

Brainwashed - Music from Sirius: The Dreams of Karlheinz Stockhausen

Written by Justin Patrick

Sunday, 26 September 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 27 September 2010 11:58



Dreaming has a long history in the arts, and examining the full sweep of people whose creations have been influenced by them would fill up many volumes, a study that would make an important contribution to art history. Karlheinz Stockhausen (22 August 1928 – 5 December 2007) was one of the most ground breaking and prolific composers of the twentieth century. Also an avid dreamer, a number of his works were based on or taken directly from his dreams.

[Karlheinz Stockhausen](#)

At times controversial and still widely misunderstood, his innovations in electronic, spatial, and temporal composition, alongside radical performance practices, have been slowly leaking into the mainstream. While clearly working in the Western classical tradition he pushed the boundaries of it to near breaking point, so much so that his music, on those first casual listens, seems to be a completely different and mutant species. His compositions are like time capsules, storehouses of knowledge waiting to be unlocked; the true nature of what he achieved is unraveled slowly.

Part of this has to do with his sheer mountains of output.

A seemingly limitless fountain of energy while alive, his time on Earth was spent composing over 350 individual pieces (often working 16 hours a day). He also oversaw the production of his music in every detail, rehearsing and conducting the musicians who would play it, checking the audio equipment and lighting at the concert halls, sitting at the mixing desk in the studio to perfect the recorded sounds. He supervised the publication of his own musical scores and in the early 1990s he obtained the licenses to most of his recordings and started a record company to make his vast body of work permanently available on compact disc. He lectured, taught summer

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courses, and wrote extensively (the many volumes of his *Texte Zur Musik* detailing the technicalities of his individual works). His aim in life can be summed up in the words spoken by the Angel Michael in his opera

Donnerstag aus Licht

(Thursday from Light), "to bring Celestial music to Humans, and Human music to Celestial beings."

On top of this he developed new technologies and electronic equipment to realize the sounds he heard in his head. Never satisfied to simply use the instruments and technology at hand if they did not conform to his vision, he would plow ahead undaunted, designing the equipment he needed. Some of these devices include the Module 69A, featuring four inputs, generators for frequency and amplitude modulation, a ring modulator, finger plates sensitive to touch (to produce rhythms with), eight potentiometers, a rotation mill, eight keys and a range of 8x8 outputs to distribute the signals to eight separate channels. Energetic to the end of his life, at age 79 with the help of his collaborators Gregorio Garcia Karman and Joachim Haas, he oversaw the design of the OKTEG- Oktophonic effect generator—a device to be used for real time panning of 24 layers of sound, each having its own spatial motion among eight loudspeakers. This device was created specifically for Cosmic Pulses. (In a personal note to Ingvar Loco Nordin, he wrote that the machines "mother lives on Sirius.")

He also made many departures from the stuffy performance atmospheres that accompany classical and academic music, broadening the palette to incorporate elements of theater and improvisation (which he called "intuitive music"). His scores often included performance and ritualistic instructions, such as directions for movement, vocalizations, and dance, or where the performer should stop playing the score altogether to freely improvise. An unrepentant mystic, he even gave instructions for meditations and prescribed the various psychic states the performer should ideally be in before and during playing. His text piece *Goldstaub* requires each musician to remain motionless while fasting alone for four days before joining the other players. Then each are to close their eyes and start playing sounds.

Ylem

, a piece based on the theory of the oscillating universe (an idea that supposes the universe expands and contracts from big bang to big crunch to big bang to big crunch, over and over again) requires that the "players establish telepathic communication with one another." Furthermore, they should play with their eyes closed while the conductor sits in the middle of the hall not doing anything but listening, ears open, eyes shut, with devout meditative concentration.

His work remains challenging and radical. Not only to the listeners, but to the performers who must jump over demanding hurdles in expanding their technique. Concert organizers must juggle the difficulties of accommodating vast multi-channel sound systems, highly specific

lighting instructions, and other details, all for a concert going public who may be fickle and unresponsive. The blueprints for performing these works are available, waiting for the enthusiastic and determined. It is for these reasons that his work has not yet been adopted at large into the repertoires of the world's symphony orchestras. Beethoven wasn't received well during his time, but now his music has been broadly adopted. In the centuries to come perhaps Stockhausen will have an equal reception.

Stockhausen pushed the musical envelope so far it became distended, bursting at the seams. Most listeners and musicians haven't yet followed the pioneer into the wild terrains he opened up, though a few brave souls have staked their claims. Many of these spheres of sound would not be available if he hadn't listened to his dreams.

I. Telemusik and Hymnen

The modern conception of sleep is a farce. According to scientific researchers the idea that humans need eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, is wrong. Our ancestors didn't sleep this way. Before artificial lighting bent biological cycles all out of shape humans usually slept in stages, often with a light sleep in the beginning, followed by several hours of wakefulness, a time the French call *dorveille*, when creative breakthroughs are likely to occur. It was after this that a deeper sleep occurred. In 1966 Stockhausen went to Japan to fulfill two commissions and while there experienced a creative breakthrough during a period of *dorveille*. Relentlessly working in the electronic studio of the Japanese Radio (NHK), he found himself sleepless for a number of days. He laid in bed one night, kept awake by a recurrent vision of, "technical processes, formal relationships, pictures of the notation, of human relationships, etc.—all at once and in a network too tangled up to be unraveled into one process." From this vision he realized

Telemusik

, fulfilling a lifelong ambition to create a unified music for the whole planet and for all its varied cultures. He mixed in found sounds and songs from all over the world (Hungary, Spain, China, Japan, the Amazons, Sahara, Bali and Vietnam) with new electronic sounds and traditional Japanese instruments to create what he called "a higher unity...a universality of past, present, and future, of different places and spaces: TELE-MUSIK."

While this may suggest collage, it is not. Stockhausen was very much against collage. Speaking of the piece he said, "I didn't want a collage, I wanted to find out if I could influence the traits of an existing kind of music, a piece of characteristic music using the traits of other music. Then I found a new modulation technique, with which I could modulate the melody curve of a singing priest with electronic timbres, for example. In any case, the abstract sound material must

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dominate, otherwise the result is really mishmash, and the music becomes arbitrary. I don't like that." This technique is what he called "intermodulation." In *Telemusik* the pre-existing source material can be heard only faintly, buried under a blur of sine waves, analog buzzes, blips, bangs and clangs. Japanese chants curve into an Amazon Shipibo Indian song, the dynamic rhythm of the electronic chords intermingling, transforming, melting from one music to the next making the song a good point of entry for delving into early electronic music in general, let alone that of Karlheinz.

Telemusik samples:

- [Telemusik excerpt 1](#)
- [Telemusik excerpt 2](#)
- [Telemusik excerpt 3](#)

Telemusik prepared Stockhausen for his next monumental undertaking, *Hymnen* (Anthem). He had already started work on, but had set it aside while in Japan. It is a piece that was based in part on the idea of humanity emerging triumphant from the fire and ashes of apocalyptic events that he claimed to have seen frequently in dreams and visions. He even went so far as to say these calamities would befall the world in the last decades of the millennium and the first few of the next.

nen

is not only a mesmerizing elaboration of studio techniques he mastered while at NHK in Japan, but also a continuation of his quest to make a world music at a time when the people around the planet were becoming increasingly connected. He achieved this goal by incorporating forty national anthems from around the globe, though he had collected 137 anthems in the process of composing, and had intended to make two more sections for the piece that never materialized. These anthems are intermodulated into an intricate web of sound lasting two hours long. Thrown into the kaleidoscopic mix are all manner of other sounds produced from sine wave generators, shortwave radio, his voice speaking, and many others.

The release from Stockhausen-Verlag comes as a four CD set with two versions, one with the electronic music only and another with the accompaniment of instrumentalists responding intuitively to the pre-recorded sounds. Soloists were also employed for many of the live performances of *Hymnen*, "lending relief and plasticity to the loudspeaker sound." This composition was even performed in the Jeita Caves of Lebanon, in 1969 and filmed by Luc Ferrari.

Where *Telemusik* succeeded in linking up various songs from around the world to create something new, *Hymnen* took the process a step further; by blending the

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anthems of the nations together he erased the artificial boundaries between countries that are seen on maps. The music ends with a new anthem for a utopian realm called "Hymunion".

Perhaps it can be reached through listening.

Hymne

n

is a

transformative listening experience.

Hymnen samples:

- [Hymnen \(Region I\)](#)
- [Hymnen \(Region II\)](#)
- [Hymnen \(Region IV\) with soloists](#)

II. Trans and Kathinkas Gesang

Trans was the first piece to come to Stockhausen based entirely on a dream.

He says, "I dreamed the piece. That is why I cannot speak freely about it; I do not have an objective relation to it: I simply dreamed it thus – in the night from December 9 to December 10, 1970, and I wrote it down from July 17 to September 4, 1971. I only know everything that one can hear and see in it. As I said, I functioned more as a medium. Also the colour, I dreamed everything. In fact, in the dream, a sort of violet fog-mist rose between the musicians...all sat in fog up to the throat, and the fog rose constantly: red-violet fog – throughout the entire piece. And I have tried to show this on a stage."

The working title of the piece was originally *Musik für den Nächsten Toten* or "Music for the Next to Die." He had the idea that the sounds heard in this composition could help the newly departed giving them guidance for their journey in the worlds beyond physical form. He also thought it could help those approaching death to prepare for their final journey. Anecdotal evidence from terminally ill hospice patients who listened to the piece told him of astral, out-of-body experiences and impressions of the afterlife they had, suggesting that for some, this music did have its intended effect.

One of the sounds heard in *Trans*, (a word which suggests trance and transition), is that of an old weaving loom and the movement by hand of its shuttle. This sound recurs throughout, about every twenty seconds, moving from the left to right speakers. While listening, it reminds me of

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how the lives of human beings are being woven by the Fates. Clotho, the spinner, spins the thread of life. Lacheis, the Disposer of Lots, assigns to each person a unique destiny. Atropos wields the shears and cuts the thread at death.

In performance, two rows of string players form a wall in front of the stage. To me this reinforces the concept of the strings of Fate. Behind their dense wall of sound, another world is heard.

Trans samples:

- [Trans \(Studio Version\) excerpt 1](#)
- [Trans \(Studio Version\) excerpt 2](#)
- [Trans \(Live:Donaueschingen world premier October 16th 1971\)](#)

The theme of creating music for those who are not only about to die, but those who are already dead is something Stockhausen returned to with a greater degree of success both sonically and conceptually in *Kathinkas Gesang* (Kathinkas Song) performed during the second act of *Samstag Aus Licht*

(Saturday from Light), the second opera he finished in his vast, seven opera cycle, *Licht*

(Light), based on the days of the week. Saturday is associated with Lucifer and death. The subject is not approached morbidly but from a metaphysical perspective. The opera provides a great service to the Western world by looking at death squarely in the face. The artistic treatment of the subject matter is dramatic, stunning, with moods that gravitate between somber and uplifting.

Stockhausen described death as just one point in a many layered process, "the idea of dying becomes polyphonic, ambiguous; death seems like a relative aspect of one layer or level, whereas other levels or layers are at different points of development..." Based on the Egyptian and Tibetan Books of the Dead, *Kathinkas Gesang*, is an examination of 24 exercises devised to assist the deceased in reaching enlightenment. In Tibetan tradition the spirit of the dead is tempted by various visions relating to a persons previous life on earth. If these are succumbed to, the soul gets pulled back down into another body, thus perpetuating the cycle of reincarnation. The goal is to avoid these temptations and glide on into enlightenment. Various techniques have been used for this, but one, the use of memorized mantras, shares a key feature with the piece in question. By knowing the right mantras or formulas, the temptations can be surpassed. In many traditions the living friends and relatives say prayers, chant various mantras, and perform particular rituals for the liberation of the soul following a loved ones death. Stockhausen conceived of

Gesang

Kathinkas

similarly.

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It is to be played for the dead person several times a day for 49 consecutive days following death. The 24 sections of the song can also be memorized by the living to assist in preparing for the transition to death.

He elaborated, "the hearing, the concentration on the listening and the sound, shall liberate the spirit, enabling it to move into the white light without any sights. Sights of demons or attractive, beautiful sights are temptations of reincarnation, weighing the spirit down towards lower regions, causing rebirth".

In addition to the version for the opera, technically titled *Kathinkas Gesang als Luzifers Requiem* (Kathinkas Song as Lucifers Requiem), where the flutist is accompanied by six percussionists, there is also a version for flute and electronics. Both are named for Kathinka Pasveer, a flutist from Holland who worked extensively with Karlheinz and for whom he wrote many new works. Both versions are enjoyable in their own right. The version in the opera is dark and somnolent. There is a feeling of trying to escape from the tomb, of clouds and dark mists. It is haunting. The electronic version feels more elastic with its bright phase-shifted overtones and harmonic transitions. Multi-layered the flute darts in and out, fluctuating, transforming, navigating through the carefully orchestrated spectrum of sounds, mimicking the soul that must find its own way through the various paths of the afterlife.

I know of no other music whose pragmatic aim is to assist those who are preparing to die as well as those who have already passed on.

Kathinkas Gesang samples:

- [Kathinkas Gesang \(Samstag aus Licht version excerpt 1\)](#)
- [Kathinkas Gesang \(Samstag aus Licht version excerpt 2\)](#)
- [Kathinkas Gesang \(Electronic version\)](#)

III. Tierkreis and Musik Im Bauch

One day while playing with his daughter Julika, Stockhausen heard gurgling noises in her stomach and told her "You have music in the belly!" This induced fits of laughter in Julika. She laughed so much she was barely able to recover from the childlike sidesplitting humor she felt in

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her stomach. Her father eventually helped calm her down, but only after much effort crawling on the floor with his two year old. When she managed to speak again, all she could say was "Music in the belly!"

Seven years later Stockhausen woke up from a dream in which he pulled three music boxes out of the belly of a man with the head of a bird, a creature later dubbed Miron. *Musik Im Bauch* (Music in the Belly) was based on Stockhausen's notes of this dream and its connection with the incidental belly music of his daughter. In working on *Musik Im Bach*,

Tierkreis

(Zodiac) was also born.

The dream inspired Stockhausen to an in depth study of the music box at the Jean Reuge music box factory in Saint Croix, Switzerland. For a week he immersed himself in the musical possibilities of the music box, discovering along the way that no original music had been composed for them, leading him to be the first who did. The tunes for the ones then extant were based off of traditional folk songs and popular melodies.

Out of this dream one of the most versatile pieces in his vast repertoire was born. It was also critical to other works such as *Sirius*. *Tierkreis* is based on the twelve solar signs of western astrology. For each sign he wrote a melody composed from a central pitch, and for each sign/melody music boxes were constructed. The sequence begins with Aquarius, the sign of his daughter Julika, having E-flat as its central pitch. The succession of pitches leads upward chromatically. Leo, the composer's own sign, is situated in the middle of the sequence with "A" at its center. The series ends with "D" assigned to Capricorn.

While composing *Tierkreis* Stockhausen thought of the various friends and family he knew who were of those particular signs, hoping to impart some of their character into the melodies. I am not alone in thinking he achieved this goal as *Tierkreis* is one of his most accessible and popular pieces.

It lends itself to a vast range of interpretations and many different versions having been recorded and performed. He wrote the score so that it can be played on any type of chordal or melody instrument. He also wrote versions that included lyrics for voice (high soprano, soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass), written in German, Italian, and English with accompaniment on a melody instrument. Other arrangements are for octet or chamber orchestra, which can be played with either bass and/or soprano. Still another version exists for flute, trumpet, clarinet

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and piano. Extremely versatile, I am certain more versions will continue to be devised. This is something Karlheinz encouraged.

When playing the music the composer intended for the melody of each sign to be played three times in a row. A complete version cycles through all twelve signs, beginning with the melody for the sign corresponding to the day of the show. For instance if a performance was scheduled on April 13th, the musicians would start by playing the melody for Aries. For a show scheduled on May 31st they would begin with the melody for Gemini. The music ends with the recurrence of the starting melody. In addition to strictly playing the melody according to the score, each musician is encouraged to improvise upon it allowing for even more variation. An average playing of the entire cycle lasts about twenty-five minutes, but they have been as short as 12 minutes and as long as 96. Of course it is also possible to play just a single melody or a smaller grouping of them, as in the version recorded by his son, world-renowned trumpeter Markus Stockhausen, along with Kathinka Pasveer, and Suzanne Stephens. They chose to play only three. The melodies for Capricorn, Cancer, Aries, and Libra were also incorporated as the principal melodies in his chamber opera *Sirius*.

Stockhausen said that an agitated person should listen to the melody of her or his sun sign to calm and sooth the mind. I believe it works. The songs are easily internalized and I have found myself humming or whistling them quite often. Just as his experiments with *Telemusik* and *Hymnen*

were designed to intermodulate various songs and sound sources, *Tierkreis* modulates the human organism itself.

Tierkreis samples:

- [Aries](#)
- [Gemini](#)
- [Tierkreis \(version for Clarinet, Flute, Trumpet & Piano\)](#)

Musik Im Bauch is a very fun and playful music theatre piece befitting a work based on a dream with its childlike spirit. It functions as a kind of mystery play whose main character is Miron, a man with the head of an eagle. His inert likeness, constructed as a type of high-end scarecrow, hangs from the ceiling. The percussionist, who plays tubular bell, and metallic sound plates, is off to the left. On the other side of the stage are two players at a marimba, and three others with glockenspiel and antique bells. In the front of the stage are three small tables. When the musicians file to their appropriate spots, they move like marionettes. Essentially percussive in its character, one of the more interesting sounds heard in this piece is that of the whips moving

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through the air. They create a whirling, rustling, centrifugal effect. Eventually the three players who are whipping the air take their switches to Miron, encircle him and give him a lashing that causes the small bells sewn on to his clothing to tinkle. The purpose of all this is to banish evil spirits from the air.

Then one of the players, brandishing a pair of scissors, cuts Miron open in the belly. Inside they find three *Tierkreis* music boxes. For a performance of *Musik Im Bauch* any three of the zodiac melodies may be chosen. The musicians play along with the boxes on glockenspiel. In fact all of what they play throughout are the three melodies, yet the tempi of each is varied. The marimba plays the melody once through stretched out for the entirety of the piece, making it extremely difficult (at best) to discern as such when played so slow.

Periodicity and cycles of time are central concerns of Stockhausen. Stretching tempos and slowing them down, or accelerating them to the point where they can be discerned not so much as rhythms but as pitch (as he did in *Kontakte*) helps to make the listeners perception of time more elastic.

Musik Im Bauch samples:

- [Musik Im Bauch excerpt1](#)
- [Musik Im Bauch excerpt 2](#)
- [Musik Im Bauch excerpt 3](#)

IV. Sirius

Over the course of his career Stockhausen developed a reputation for egomania. His works have been criticized as being pompous and self-indulgent. The notion he had of coming from the star system Sirius didn't dampen these views, but rather served to amplify people's view of him as a difficult eccentric.

He came to hold this view about himself, again, through the help of his daughter Julika. Around the time she was five or six she began asking for a dog. He got the dog for her and named it Sirius, it being the dogstar. He had just finished working on *Sternklang* (Star Sound), a composition to be performed in parks under the night sky, and which he had envisioned as greeting music for extraterrestrials should they ever choose to visit the earth. The constellation

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of Canis Major was occupying a lot of his thoughts after completing this piece. He read a book by the visionary mystic Jakob Lorber that described Sirius as the star around which the Solar System itself orbits. Then the dreams came. "Other snippets of vitally important information then came to me through a couple of revelatory dreams. Crazy dreams, from which it emerged that not only did I come from Sirius itself, but that, in fact, I completed my musical education there."

Other than this reference he never disclosed the exact nature of his dreams. It would be interesting to know more about them, and I wonder if it is mentioned at all in his personal papers and writings. He did however maintain that discussing the dreams would "lead to misunderstanding and false interpretation." The composer did contend that for the beings live on Sirius, "everything is music, or the art of co-ordination and harmony of vibrations. . . . The art is very highly developed there, and every composition on Sirius is related to the rhythms of nature . . . the seasons, the rhythms of the stars."

The composition of *Sirius* followed these experiences, beginning its life as a commission from the West German government to celebrate the bicentenary of the United States. Dedicated to the "American pioneers on earth and in space" it is really a tribute to all of humanity, and especially those astronauts who seek to voyage beyond this pale blue dot. As one of the singers announces in the opening section of the music, "May the Music of Sirius be the Felicitation to the Pioneers of Earth and in Space. May a more Divine Mankind come out of your works"! His musical conceptions of the world always sought to unite people across borders, and bring them together as citizens of one planet./p>

The music begins with an otherworldly whirling hum. It starts slowly, accelerates, and then slows down again. It is hard not to see images of flying saucers in my imagination during this short electronic intro. It conjures up a feeling that visitors from far away in some distant galaxy have touched down and are ready to make contact. It continues with words: invocations of the four directions, the announcement of the four principal musicians: bass vocalist, representing the north, earth, man, night, seed and winter; the trumpeter, symbolizing fire, youth, morning, spring; the soprano vocalist signifying water, woman, midday, blossom, summer; and bass clarinet assuming the role of west, air, evening, autumn. A tape of musique concrete plays sounds of fire, water, crunching leaves, wind, and crackling ice in the appropriate places, further evoking the seasons and elements.

One of the most exciting aspects of *Sirius* is its central section, called The Wheel of the Year. Once again the melodies from Tierkreis are used as a basis. The Wheel is split into four parts, one for each season, each lasting around a quarter of an hour, during which time the main melodies of Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn dominate. The season when a performance

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takes place determines the starting point of the wheel section. If scheduled in winter this section would begin with the melody for Capricorn, if in the summer, Cancer, ending with the section preceding the starting season to complete the wheel. The remaining eight melodies are also present in a secondary capacity.

The concept of intermodulation is fully at play in this composition. The melodies ceaselessly transform into one another, rhythms, timbres, and tempo all melting together. This is done with electronic music played on a voltage controlled EMS Synthesizer-100 in addition to the vocalist and instrumentalists listed above.

The first couple of times I listened to *Sirius* I found it difficult and exciting. After I'd familiarized myself with the *Tierkreis* melodies and came back to the piece with more educated ears I could distinguish the various phrasings and elaborations within the sections. The music was even more enjoyable and the difficulty was gone.

However one of the main challenges of listening to current recordings of any Stockhausen piece is the way it is mixed down. If seen at a proper concert the music of *Sirius* would be mixed into sixteen loudspeakers arranged around the hall. Compressing all of the music together into two stereo channels is a compromise. This is something that applies to many of his recordings. It is sad to think that the only times I really get to experience "surround sound" is when I go to the cinema, and there it is trite. I will rejoice when standard stereo equipment expands beyond the parameters of a left and right speaker and the meager selection of Dolby 5.1 mixes currently available.

Sirius is majestic, and regal, a truly stellar work, a glittering jewel in the crown of the composers achievements.

Sirius samples:

- [Sirius excerpt 1](#)
- [Sirius excerpt 2](#)
- [Sirius excerpt 3](#)

V. Helikopter-Streichquartett

Licht (Light), subtitled *The Seven Days of the Week* is easily Stockhausen's greatest achievement. Performed in its entirety it clocks in at over 29 hours, and is considered to be the longest stage work since Richard Wagner's

Ring der Nibelungen

(The Ring of the Nibelung). Many critics of Karlheinz thought that the entire cycle of seven operas would never be completed but he proved them wrong, finishing the enormous project 26 years after he first began it 1977. As the masterpiece of his life's work it draws upon and integrates the diversity of styles and methods of composition he pioneered between 1952 and the time he started the opera while also drawing heavily on Japanese Gagaku and Noh theatre and various spiritual and metaphysical traditions from around the world.

Based on the seven days of the week, with an opera for each day, this work like *Tierkreis* and *Sirius*

, is cyclical in nature. His obsession with the cycles of nature, time, and earth-based calendars is a motif running throughout his work. It can be seen in the lyrics to the vocal work *Stimmung* from 1968 and he continued running with the theme after finishing *Licht* by beginning work on *Klang*, twenty-four pieces, one for each hour of the day. Sadly he only completed twenty-one of the scores for *Klang* before he died. After this he quipped that he planned to write a piece for every minute of the hour.

Licht was constructed using a method known as super-formula composition, a technique derived from serialism, where a single, two or three part contrapuntal melody is projected, multiplied-out or expanded. In formula composition the musical characteristics of pitch, duration, tempo, dynamics, and timbre are heard within the sound by the use of a melodic tone succession. The formula defines the macro and micro-scales of the music. *Licht* was composed using three counterpointed super-formulas, with a melody for each of the three principal characters Michael, Eve and Lucifer.

One of the many fascinating aspects of these operas is their modular construction. The operas not only work as one whole piece but each of the seven is a piece in itself. Furthermore, the individual acts, scenes, and sometimes parts of scenes act as modules, and can be performed alone. These modules are sometimes stripped down versions of what appeared in the opera, such as *Oktophonie*, which is an electronic layer from the second act of *Dienstag aus Licht* (Tuesday from Light) or combinations of layers with either one instrument or vocals omitted. The module may also be a segment of a piece.

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The *Helikopter-Streichquartett* (Helicopter String Quartet) is one such module, and forms the third scene of *Mittwoch Aus Licht* (Wednesday from Light). The inspiration for it came directly from a dream. Stockhausen initially had no interest in writing a string quartet when he was approached with a commission for one by Professor Hans Landesmann of the Salzburg Festival. Then he had a dream which changed his mind. In it, he flew above four helicopters, each containing a member of the string quartet. The helicopters in his dream were transparent, so he could see through them. He sketched out the dream and made some preliminary plans, but did not find the time to compose it until 1992-1993.

It is a complex work, requiring not only four helicopters who have specific flight paths and patterns they must make in the air, and string players who must be synchronized in time though separated in space, but also transmissions of live video signals to an auditorium equipped with four columns of televisions and loudspeakers, one for each helicopter/musician. Microphones are placed on the rotator blades of the helicopter making them secondary instruments. The strings are intended to be louder in the mix than the blades. The audience watches on the monitors and listens on the speakers while all the action takes place outside and above them.

Many logistical leaps and hurdles were overcome by Stockhausen and the organizers of the first performance to make the dream a reality. I appreciate his creative willfulness and the sheer gumption that led to the work being realized. It carries an important lesson for other dreamers: sometimes it is necessary to infect others with a personal dream.

The musicality of [Helikopter-Streichquartett](#) is a dense whirlwind of grating tremolo. It begins slowly with the take off, reaching a climax at great heights where the volume between strings and helicopter blades are mixed equally, and finally ending with the descent and landing. The structure of the piece has a pleasing symmetry.

Helikopter-Streichquartett samples:

- [Helikopter-Streichquartett excerpt 1](#)
- [Helikopter-Streichquartett excerpt 2](#)
- [Helikopter-Streichquartett excerpt 3](#)

VI. Welt-Parlament

Brainwashed - Music from Sirius: The Dreams of Karlheinz Stockhausen

Written by Justin Patrick

Sunday, 26 September 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 27 September 2010 11:58

In an interview with Julia Spinola, Stockhausen said, "I am really an adventurer... I give myself tasks without knowing how I am going to solve them. For example in crazy dreams like the *Helikopter-Streichquartett*

... Or in

Welt-Parlamen

t where I suddenly dreamt that a world parliament comes together that does not even exist yet." It is not made clear whether this dream was figurative or literal. I don't think it matters, as the power of his vision was clear and true.

Karlheinz was truly a musician of the world. In the same interview he talked about how he was the first to use the term "world music" (weltnmusik) starting in 1964, and continued to use the term in various texts since 1973. *Welt-Parlament* (World Parliament) makes up the first scene of *Mittwoch aus Licht*, and sees the maestro expanding upon his vision of world music that was first approached in *Telemusik*, and elaborated upon in *Hymnen*. The final

region of

Hymnen

uses the Swiss anthem and transforms its final chords into the anthem of an imaginary utopian realm he called "Hymunion in Harmondie under Pluramon".

Weltparlamen

t is a continuation of his vision of world music. Perhaps the world parliament he dreamed of will be the group who is able to bring the utopia of Hymunion into being one day.

The subject matter receives a fabulous treatment with a cappella choir. The president of the parliament opens the scene with the announcement, "Love is our issue here". Then in unknown and imaginary languages twelve groups of singers burst out, giving superb vocal performances, each group also singing in a different rhythm. While the singing is performed in unknown languages they spiral through the backwards from u to i, to and forwards for a to i. The consonants are made strange with delicate consonance, trills, guttural and otherwise emotive playfulness demonstrating the remarkable range of styles a human voice is capable of making. There are also some discernable lyrics, my favorite being the heart felt messages "Love is cosmic glue" and "Love can see the other point of view, love heals this world."

Welt-Parlament samples:

- [Welt-Parlament excerpt 1](#)
- [Welt-Parlament excerpt 2](#)
- [Welt-Parlament excerpt 3](#)

Conclusion

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The early life of the composer was deeply marked by the tragedies and brutalities imposed by Germany during World War II. His mother had been institutionalized in 1932 following a nervous breakdown. During the war he was told she had died of leukemia, but everyone else in the asylum had also "died of leukemia". This story was just a cover up for the Nazi policy of killing by lethal injection of what were termed "useless eaters". This story was later dramatized by being made into a scene for *Donnerstag Aus Licht* (Thursday from Light). In 1945 his father Simon left once again for the front in the war, telling his son, "I'm not coming back. Look after things."

He lived through one of the most terrifying chapters in human history and did not let it cripple him. If anything he was spurred on to ever greater heights by the tragedies he had lived through. His visions and dreams fed him with essential material that was intrinsic to the whole of his work, which can be viewed as a spiral of inner and outer growth. He was deeply engaged with humanitarian concerns, striving to bring the world together, not under the dominion of a fascist dictatorship, but in an enlightened utopia where music is a primary tool used for expanding human potentials, not just on the earth but out into the cosmos. He was a firm believer that collective human destiny is in the stars. To help us further our reach, he stretched his to the utmost in bringing the music of the stars to earth. In doing so he expanded the parameters in which music can be composed for generations to come.

Stockhausen was also a teacher deeply concerned with the cycles of time. In *Tierkreis* he explored the months and the constellations ruling them, in

Sirius

he gave moving meditations on the four seasons as experienced on Earth but from a perspective beyond this Solar System. His opera cycle

Licht

delved into the various mythologies and symbolisms associated with the seven days of the week, and with the twenty-one completed pieces for

Klang

he zoomed further in on the spiral to capture the essence of the hours of the day. Stockhausen did not see death as the end and left humanity musical maps to help navigate the afterlife. In his own afterlife I believe he is still composing, bombarding the planet with cosmic pulses, sonic packages and seeds of music awaiting the right minds to grasp them, plant and bring to flower.

Sources:

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Stockhausen: Conversations with the Composer, by Jonathan Cott, Robson Books 1974

Works of Karlheinz Stockhausen, by Robin Maconie, Oxford University Press 1976

Stockhausen on Music: Lectures and Interviews, by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Robin Maconie, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd 2000

Conversations with Stockhausen, by Mya Tannenbaum, David Butchart (translator), Oxford University Press 1988

<http://www.stockhausen.org>

<http://www.sonoloco.com/rev/stockhausen/stockhausen.html>

All samples come from the Stockhausen-Verlag editions of his work on compact disc. The two exceptions are the *Tierkreis* version for Clarinet, Flute, Trumpet and Piano released by Acanta from Hamburg, Germany and *The Helicopter String Quartet* played by the Arditti Quartet and released by Disques Montaigne